

## **Calls to ease the diabetes mental health epidemic**

Almost 700,000 people living with diabetes experience a mental or emotional health challenge every year, according to the latest data from Diabetes Australia.

Diabetes Australia Group CEO Justine Cain says diabetes mental health challenges are the most prevalent, yet least recognised diabetes complication.

“Concerningly, the latest figures show that about 400,000 people living with diabetes report difficulties accessing mental health care. That’s a lot of people who aren’t getting the help and support they need,” she said.

The new data has prompted Diabetes Australia to launch its new *Let’s Rethink Diabetes* campaign as part of National Diabetes Week (10 – 16 July).

Ms Cain said there is an urgent need for change to both community attitudes and the way Australia’s health system delivers diabetes mental health support.

“Diabetes mental health challenges are widespread, but they are rarely discussed as part of routine diabetes care. They really are a silent diabetes complication,’ Ms Cain said.

“We want people to know that diabetes mental health challenges are real and encourage people with diabetes and their healthcare professionals to explore options for mental health care.”

Ms Cain called on all Australians to rethink how they think about diabetes.

“More than 1.1 million Australians report being blamed or shamed for living with diabetes and more than 360,000 say this impacts their ability to live well with the condition,” she said.

“Nobody chooses diabetes and nobody should be blamed or shamed for living with it.”

Ms Cain said there was no silver bullet but there were some key areas of action that could significantly improve outcomes for people with diabetes.

1. Better awareness of diabetes mental health issues like diabetes distress and burnout
2. Putting mental health support at the centre of diabetes healthcare
3. Calling out diabetes-related stigma wherever it happens.

Leading GP Dr Gary Deed, who specifically is involved in providing healthcare to people living with diabetes, said he was seeing more people with diabetes experiencing mental and emotional health challenges.

“Living with diabetes can be complex and unrelenting. That daily management, on top of the worry about long-term diabetes-related complications, can become a real burden,” Dr Deed said.

“It’s important that health professionals understand the reality of living with diabetes and I’d encourage people working in the field to undertake relevant training to support all people with diabetes.”

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# MEDIA RELEASE



Sebastian Harris, 19, whose younger brother was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes three years before him, says the constant management of his condition can be overwhelming.

“I sometimes feel that no matter what I do, my diabetes can be extremely hard to control.

“Some weeks my blood glucose levels can be unreasonably low or unreasonably high and it doesn’t make any sense, no matter what you do.

“It makes me question whether I am managing it well. I know in the long run it will be fine but, in that moment, it’s hard not to feel defeated.

“You want to switch off and forget about it, but you can’t do that with diabetes. There’s no holiday from it.

“The consequences if you do try to ignore it can be life-threatening. We need to make sure people are aware of the issues, both physical and mental,” he said.

**#ENDS#**

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